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ABSTRACT

Individuals can produce good stresses that will inhibit or eliminate the bad stresses of anxiety, depression, resentment, and hopelessness. This can be accomplished as individuals learn to include in their lifestyles these nine approaches: self-talk, commitment, self-control, challenge, interpersonal relations, time management, relaxation, exercise, and nutrition. When individuals become advocates of themselves, they are aware that their primary support comes from within, from their constructive, rational self-talks. Good health and a sense of fulfillment through self-expression are attained when individuals commit themselves to respectable work and causes. Self-control begins with taking charge of one's attitudes. Challenge provides a means of helping individuals to develop into flexible, resilient persons who can face the normal and unexpected circumstances of life. Assertiveness provides the key to successful interpersonal relationships. Time management helps individuals to use time wisely by making it more productive and by controlling and preventing bad stresses. Relaxation helps sustain balance in life by lowering and eliminating stress, improving health, reducing reliance on drugs, and maintaining energy and productivity. Exercise provides a means of removing individuals from pressures and stimulates the production of chemicals that benefit the body. Balanced nutrition helps to maintain a sound body and control of one's life. (A recommended reading list is included.) (Author/NB)

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STRESS CAN BE A FRIEND: APPROACHES TO PRODUCING GOOD STRESSES THAT REDUCE AND CONTROL BAD STRESSES

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Running head: Stress

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Abstract

We, as a matter of choice, can produce friendly good stresses (joy, peace, patience, compassion, enthusiasm) that will inhibit or eliminate the bad stresses of anxiety, depression, resentment, and hopelessness. We can achieve this objective--through time and the changing or polishing of our attitudes and behaviors--by including in our lifestyles the nine approaches of self-talk, commitment, self-control, challenge, interpersonal relations, time-management, relaxation, exercise, and nutrition. When advocates of ourselves, we are aware that our primary support comes from within, from our constructive, rational self-talks, producers of hope. Good health and a sense of fulfillment through self-expression are attained when we commit ourselves to respectable work and causes. Self-control begins with taking charge of our attitudes, freedom that can not be taken away from us. Challenge provides a means of helping us to develop into flexible, resilient individuals who can face the normal and unexpected circumstances of life. Assertiveness, the positive adult approach to communication, provides the key to successful interpersonal relationships on and away from the job. Time-Management helps us to use our time wisely by making it more productive and by controlling and preventing stress from occurring. Relaxation helps us to sustain balance in our lives by lowering and eliminating stress, improving our health, reducing reliance on drugs, and maintaining energy and productivity. Exercise provides a means of removing us from all pressures and stimulates the production of chemicals that benefit our muscles, cardiovascular systems, other vital organs, and our total bodies, making us feel good. To have balanced nutrition, we must include a variety of foods and vitamins which, in part, help us to maintain sound bodies and control of our lives. (A Recommended Reading list is composed of nine publications.)

STRESS CAN BE A FRIEND: APPROACHES TO PRODUCING GOOD STRESSES THAT REDUCE AND CONTROL BAD STRESSES

Stress is a response, reaction, perception, adaptation to a situation. The presence of good or bad stresses in our lives can be a matter of choice, for we can relate positively or negatively to an event.

Because of this choice factor for relating to stress, there are three types of personalities. Some individuals may allow stress to completely destroy themselves. Other individuals may learn how to control it. Whereas, amazingly, some will thrive on stress, turning bad stresses into good stresses.

Death is the only means for being completely free of stress. Life is stress, and the good stresses add meaning to the daily processes of living. These stresses motivate us to grow, perform, compete, achieve, help others, and confront challenges. The good stresses, for example, joy, peace, patience, compassion, enthusiasm, inhibit or eliminate the bad stresses of anxiety, depression, resentment, and hopelessness.

Bad stresses are produced when we feel that our self-esteem is threatened, when we feel helpless and unable to solve a problem, and when we feel we are not in control of our lives. An overload of these distresses will lead to

poor performance and a multitude of illnesses, from headaches, dizziness, high blood pressure to heart disease.

There are fortunately realistic facts that determine effective adaptation to stress. In short and with time and a change or polishing of our attitudes and behaviors, we can successfully produce good stresses by including these nine suggested approaches in our lifestyles: Self-Talk, Commitment, Self-Control, Challenge, Interpersonal Relations, Time-Management, Relaxation, Exercise, and Nutrition.

Self-Talk

Destructive self-talks are the sources of much stress. We, sometimes unknowingly, create stress when we strive for maladaptive, self-defeating perfection, instead of achievements of only our best. Through continuously putting-down ourselves, we forget to emphasize encouragement, self-acceptance and the reality, practice of there is always room for improvement. Through focusing attention to our so-called failures and temporary setbacks, we forget to promote our self-confidence for future successes by recalling our past achievements which can not be denied. Worst of all, through our own psychological harassments, we cultivate fear and poor performance on our jobs, instead of realistically acknowledging that we, in our own way, can learn how to handle stress which comes with employment and success.

Hopelessness, then, is the major bad stress of destructive self-talks. But when advocates of ourselves, we are aware that our primary support comes from within, from our constructive, rational self-talks, producers of hope. We assume responsibility for our own behaviors and admit that ineffective behaviors can be unlearned. As a result, we turn increasingly to pleasant thoughts, talks, and actions. For example, we conscientiously plan and engage in more than one pleasant activity in a day and note how our good moods become dominant. Such pleasant activities and positive self-talks help us to concentrate our engergies on solving problems and maximizing good stresses which minimize bad stresses.

Commitment

The fruits of peace, good health, and sense of fulfillment through self-expression are attained when we commit ourselves to respectable work and causes. Beginning with a belief in ourselves, we continue to grow by gaining knowledge and understanding of this selected commitment. Belief and knowledge are then enhanced through the balancing of this commitment to ourselves, others, community, and activities beyond work.

Commitment also provides us with a sense of purpose which is achieved, in part, through short- and long-term goals. Realistic attainable goals direct, motivate, and

strengthen our self-esteem. For through achievement of short-term aims, we see our progress and further understand the significance of pursuing long-term goals. Long-term goals, once attained, motivate us to further achieve and eliminate unnecessary frustrations that produce distress.

Self-Control

Having control over our lives means managing our attitudes, freedom that can not be taken away from us. Three principal attitudes, overlapping in functions and characteristics, constitute self-control: Positive, winning, and optimistic-self-confident.

Because of positive attitudes, we have learned how the interactions of the mind and body powerfully affect each other. This knowledge has helped us to deal with difficulties as they develop and to anticipate and prevent, if possible, problems before they occur. For example, unemployment is a realistic, obvious source of stress. Resilience to this form of stress, however, is increased by facing and accepting the loss, studying other alternatives, and successfully preparing, searching, and obtaining a new job. In addition, for some people, through the centuries, a strong religious faith has sustained their positive attitudes.

The winning attitude is the avenue to growth, for we come to learn from our mistakes, and in doing so, we become aware of new options. For instance, we learn to value employment that allows us to be more in control of what we do. We learn the difference between rigid, artificial control and the actual taking of our lives into our own hands. Furthermore, it is through a winning attitude that we can maintain a sense of humor and instead of fighting or evading a situation, we can realistically adapt to changes which will enable us to achieve future prosperity.

As the result of an optimistic-self-confident attitude, we possess a realistic belief that we can achieve, influence, and determine favorable events in our lives. This belief is tempered by the factor of self-discipline. An example of the lack of efficiency, a good source of stress, occurs when we allow interruptions from a certain task, rather than maintaining the stick-to-it principle until completed. It is also this self-discipline that helps us to find out what we want, what we can do, and what our environment provides so that we can plan and have realistic expectations and decisions about our future. Such an attitude, then, allows us to deal optimistically with a diversity of events as they occur.

Challenge

Synonymous with change and similar to the winning attitude, challenge is a stimulant for personal growth. It is a means of helping us to develop into flexible, resilient individuals who can face the normal and unusual circumstances of life. These circumstances, not to be viewed as threats to security, are opportunities for self-mastery and accomplishment. These opportunities help us to understand and improve our lives, for these unexpected events provide unexpected areas of growth, security, and success.

Interpersonal Relations

Assertiveness, the positive adult approach to communication, is the key to successful interpersonal relationships on and away from the job. Without violating the rights of others, assertiveness is an open, direct, honest, appropriate expression of ourselves and our rights, thoughts, emotions, and abilities. To reduce appreciable anxiety and to increase our sense of worth, it is very important that we learn how to stand up for ourselves and to perform on our own initiatives. When standing up for ourselves in ways that we respect, we are assertively maintaining our self-esteem. In addition, assertiveness is the key to making constructive changes in a given organization.

There is a criterion for assertive behavior. To determine if a certain act were assertive, we can ask ourselves did it increase our self-respect slightly. If the act were assertive, our self-respect will be increased.

The major skills and rights of assertiveness are saying no, confronting, expressing anger, dealing with put-downs, avoiding game-playing, getting along well with others on the job, and coping with the system. We also have the right to be our own judge, change our minds, say we do not know, understand, care, need all people to like us, and do whatever interests us as long as no one is hurt.

The skills of saying no and confronting are similar in that both actions are inevitable. To protect our resources, we have to set priorities which include saying yes to some tasks and diplomatically, appropriately saying no to others. As with saying no, there will be occasions when we must confront the actions of another, for example, on the basis of ethics or just for mere clarification.

Anger, which we all feel, is to be valued, for it is a natural, healthy human feeling. Unlike aggression, we can learn how to express anger positively and assertively. This means that we do not have to wait until this feeling has developed into resentment. Instead, we can be direct, honest, and spontaneous in communication, without using sarcasm,

innuendoes, put-downs, name-calling, and physical attacks. More important, this constructive, assertive approach to expressing anger will prevent bad stress responses.

If criticism, justified or unjustified, is expressed in a magnified or inappropriate manner, it is a put-down. If considered a put-down, we must take time to think, then always respond to this kind of remark. We are not to feel that our response will hurt this person's feelings. For if there is no response to such a put-down as it occurs, we will become scapegoats and will not be respected by our friends nor ourselves. It is thus helpful to have an arsenal of phrases for automatic response to such forms of disrespect: Why are you angry? Why are you in a bad mood?

Affectations, rituals, and game-playing result only in meaningless, deceitful communications that generate bad stresses. Over 90 percent of game-playing produces lowered self-images, unhappiness, nonproductive performance--in other words--a waste of time. However, we can be truly assertive adult I'm OK, You're OK individuals and not play games, nor participate in affectations and rituals. (A typical overused ritual is How are you?) We can stop game-playing--since our rights are violated--by merely denying initiators what they want.

For good employer-employee relationships, five factors--including the other skills of assertiveness--help us to get

along well with colleagues, subordinates, and supervisors: listening, teamwork, delegation, feedback, and cancer of the brain individuals. Active listening to the ideas and concerns of others keep us abreast of present and future developments. It is also an effective, meaningful way of showing that we care and respect others. That respect is continued in our development of support systems that foster the team spirit for involvement in crucial decision-making.

Support is further developed and expanded when we, through providing freedom to make mistakes and to grow, delegate work to other competent, responsible individuals. Delegation thus promotes morale and wise expressive use of our skills for self-management and self-preservation.

Positive feedback becomes a followup to delegation. For when we delegate, it is our belief that individuals will do well. Feedback will confirm that belief and highlight the special capabilities of these individuals.

Unfortunately, we are not always blessed to be in an environment of all competent, cooperative individuals. In this instance, we can maximize the good relations and minimize the others. One approach is to view difficult, noncooperative workers as inflicted with cancer of the brain. In doing so, we will not have to torture ourselves for such irrational, difficult to get along with behavior. As a

result, we can continue to achieve our goals for excellent job performance and for good interpersonal relationships.

By coping with the system, we can continue to develop, nurture, and achieve our goals. We can continue the lifelong process of becoming assertive individuals, polishing our self-images with a We're OK self-confident attitude. The self-images will motivate us to acquire knowledge of the policies, attitudes and prejudices of the system. Such encouragement will help us to remain assertive and competent as we develop skills and strategies for dealing with encountered prejudices, discussing or fighting them. These experiences will enable us to achieve our goals by working within, through or against the system. Yet if this system continues to be lacking in growth, flexibility, and support of our goals, then we must acknowledge that it is time to quit, to find a better environment.

Time-Management

Time-management is stress-management. Both managements help us to control and prevent stress from occurring. By wisely using our time, we make it more productive. Management begins by finding out how we use our time. Next, we try to determine how we can use that time productively. Then, to make all time productive we set priorities.

But before we set priorities, we must remember the general principle of stress-management: The value of our self-worth is determined from within ourselves. This principle will help us to eliminate the fear of failure. As a consequence, we can accurately determine how much time should be devoted to each activity, when to end it, and when to begin another.

An effective way of concentrating our energies is to set and rank priorities. For example, significant activities that need to be completed within a short period of time should receive the highest rankings. Once ranking has been determined, we stick with the number one priority until it has been completed, or as much as possible has been done. Then we focus attention to priority number two. This method of scheduling will result in satisfied quality achievement.

Setting priorities will also help and motivate us to avoid certain stressors and procrastination. Because stressors cause stress, we can wisely select those we need and avoid the others.

Procrastination prevents us from completing indispensable tasks which help us to achieve our objectives. To prevent procrastination, we can rank our least favorite tasks as high priorities and then adhere to the principle of self-discipline for achievement.

Good time-management becomes a way of doing and completing a small number of tasks at a realistic pace. Whereas, poor management results in scheduling large quantities of activities that are seldom completed.

Relaxation, Exercise and Nutrition

A major deterrent to bad stresses, relaxation helps us to maintain balance in our daily lives. For in addition to lowering or eliminating stresses, relaxation will improve our health, reduce reliance on drugs, and maximize energy and productivity. Our time-management schedule should definitely include daily relaxation, activities that will enhance our sense of identity and self-esteem. These activities should not be scheduled so rigidly that engagement will begin only when a certain task has been completed, but rather as breaks integrated into work and projects, ranging from 5 to 15 minutes and longer.

Our personality types will help determine which forms of relaxation will be best for us. These activities can range from breathing to visualizing images. For example, we can relax for about five minutes by doing a deep breathing exercise. Repeating this exercise as many times as desired, place both hands on the abdomen, breathe slowly through the nose, and feel the abdomen expand as the lungs take in this air. Or, we can take a ten-minute quieting break every four

hours by sitting, closing our eyes, and just letting our minds wander. Or, we can take ourselves on a 15-minute imagined mini-vacation. These three activities and other selections will help us to balance our life styles and work performances, renewing our sense of choice and self-control.

Definitely, relaxation, coupled with daily proper exercise and nutrition, deters the production of bad stresses. Our personality types also determine the most frequent, feasible approaches to exercise and nutrition.

Regular exercise not only provides a means of removing ourselves from all pressures, but stimulates the production of chemicals that benefit our muscles, cardiovascular systems, other vital organs, and total bodies, making us feel good. Examples of daily 20-minute aerobic exercises are walking and running in place, jumping rope, stationary cycling, brisk walking, jogging, bicycling, swimming, ice hockey, and aerobic dancing. All of these activities and other selections will help us to desensitize, keep stress contained and reduce anxiety reactions.

Finally, like the realistic awareness of the ever-presence of stress, we usually can not eliminate the daily consumption of fast-food products. But we can balance our diets by including a variety of foods. Attention should also be given to the recommendations of some authorities: Include,

as part of a wholesome diet, vitamins, especially B, C, and tryptophan. In doing so, we--through adhering to the other factors that produce friendly good stresses-can maintain sound bodies and control of our lives.

Recommended Reading

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